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ABSTRACT

Themes that should be included in an elementary and secondary peace studies curriculum are discussed in this newsletter essay. Social studies teachers must use great discretion as to what topics in the peace studies curriculum are taught at what level. The study of nuclear arms should be included in peace studies at the secondary level. Research and informal interviews with secondary and college students indicate that youth are not knowledgeable about nuclear arms and, furthermore, do not think that nuclear policy can be influenced by what individuals do or don't do. The social studies curriculum teaches students a great deal about war. But it should also, through peace studies at all levels, focus greater attention on peace. Elementary and secondary students should learn about peacemakers, those who oppose war, and about alternatives to war. There are many other themes that can be included in peace studies curriculum, e.g., foreign language study, cross cultural studies, and sister city/sister school projects. (RM)

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Peace Studies*

By Vito Perrone
University of North Dakota

Before I get very far into this discussion, I wish to establish several critical points. To begin with, you represent a mixed group of elementary and secondary teachers. While the social studies goals at these varying levels have similarities, there are important differences as well. There are aspects of Peace Studies, a "reverence for life" in Albert Schweitzer's terms, or "ashima," the non-violence against any form of life so eloquently expressed by Gandhi, or conflict resolution, or learning about diverse cultures and world views, for example, that can be addressed in similar ways across the various grade levels. On the other hand, issues of active citizenship will assume some different directions and one would hardly face very young children with all of the dilemmas of nuclear arms. They certainly should be spared all of the possible views of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the area of peace studies, as with all other curricula, regardless of their perceived political or social content, the teacher needs to bring a powerful understanding of development as well as good judgment.

I will not in this presentation always differentiate in terms of what is appropriate for one level and less appropriate for another, but I will count on you to know that I could do this and that you will make the differentiations that seem sensible to you.

By implication, I have already suggested that Peace Studies is more than a study of nuclear arms or of war. But inasmuch as Peace Studies is often defined in this narrow manner, its appropriateness has become a matter of debate. Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum, for example, has railed against curricula that focus attention on nuclear arms and nuclear war, viewing such studies as values laden and political. She is, of course, essentially correct (though I believe her analysis is questionable). To examine closely the history of the current arms race, including the failed efforts to establish reasonable controls, the redundancy in the numbers of missiles and warheads, the search for superiority through yet another technological breakthrough, the dangers, and the like, is to bring into the classroom an overload of political and moral dilemmas. But given my particular view that the schools should be intentional citizenship-forming institutions, settings which encourage active participation of students in their communities, in the social, political, and economic life around them, places that encourage a deep understanding of the issues which give shape to public discourse, I would, of course, support the inclusion of the arms race, with all of its political, economic and moral dilemmas, into a Peace Studies Program in the schools.

In contrast to this interest on behalf of active citizenship, Mrs. Schlafly and others argue that the schools should be neutral, to as

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**Speech given October 18, 1985, at the annual meeting of the North Dakota Council for Social Studies.*

large a degree as possible value-free. Yet we know that the schools can never be neutral in any absolute sense and they cannot be value-free. By what they do and don't do as institutions in their stated curricula and procedures, by what teachers do and don't do, stress and don't stress, and by the ways in which teachers live out their lives, the commitments they make as citizens, important values are constantly being expressed.

In the spring, at our Peace Studies Symposium, Brian Petkau, a Canadian religious teacher, presented A Prairie Puzzle, a study of nuclear arms in North Dakota and what these weapons represent. It was a powerful personal statement. You would have been surprised at how much anger several young North Dakota students expressed about "how little they knew." They asked why they hadn't learned more about the missile fields, the kinds of weapons that existed and the related control mechanisms, the cost of these weapons, and importantly, they stressed, their potential as targets. In not making the nuclear arms in North Dakota or in the country or in the world a matter of serious study in the schools these students attended, what kinds of values were being expressed? Were students being prepared for active citizenship?

Whether we like it or not there exists a specter of fear among young people that may well be unparalleled --a sense that the future is not at all secure. This comes out in many ways--in the silence, in the denial, in the expressions of confusion. I sat with a group of eighth and ninth graders a year ago who shared with me their constant sense of fear. One said, "Every time I hear about more weapons, I think the war is getting closer." Another said, "I'm glad to be living in Grand Forks because I know I'll be killed immediately and won't have to go through weeks or months of suffering and agony."

Two years ago, we asked all of our incoming freshmen--essentially two months removed from high school --to read Nuclear War: What's In It For You. Those who came to the discussions--essentially 200 out of the potential 1,500 incoming freshmen--were almost universally surprised about how many weapons existed as well as the magnitude of their destructive capabilities. They were also dismayed about their level of ignorance, their sense of despair. We spent a good deal of time stressing the major theme of the book; namely, that the critical issues surrounding nuclear weaponry and nuclear policy are absolutely understandable by common persons--even students. And further, that nuclear policy can be influenced by what individuals do or don't do. They tended not to believe this, their sense of impotence being dominant. In regard to the role ordinary citizens might play, you might have noted a recent column by the conservative writer James Kilpatrick in which he suggests that the so-called keepers of the wisdom of nuclear arms have brought us closer to catastrophe than security and that the understandings of so-called non-experts--the citizens--needed to become paramount or there was little chance of a reversal in the arms race. It was the first time in years I found myself in agreement.

I need to make one more comment about that group of freshman students. In the 1950's and 60's, one met few high school graduates who had not read John Hersey's Hiroshima. Among these freshmen, only a handful had read it. It is a classic text that needs to be read by every generation of students. It is, as

Robert Lifton suggests, "our text," the work that puts us in touch with the past and the present and possibly the future.

I asked a group of 25 high school junior and senior students a while back to rate their understandings of nuclear arms. On a 1-10 scale with 10 being high, every response fell at four and below. When I asked, "What should your understanding be?" everyone checked 8, 9, or 10. In response to the question, "Is it possible for you to know as much as the President of the United States?," no response was above five. In response to whether the school should offer a strong unit on nuclear arms issues, every response was above eight. With regard to whether individuals can influence public policy, no one responded above three. I also asked how likely it would be for them to attend a public hearing on "Nuclear War Crisis Relocation." Twenty-two responded "not at all likely." Most had never attended a major public hearing on any subject. Needless to say, I believe we have a lot of work to do.

To address the subject of Peace Studies, we do need to work our way through war, but we can't stop there.

I have tried over the past few days, as I have thought about this presentation, to reflect on war historically. As you know, war has somehow carried with it an imagery of the heroic. (In this regard, if I were in a high school today, I would work Rambo into a major inquiry study.) My early schooling provided the usual detached matter-of-fact accounts of war. And the Saturday afternoon movies were a constant stream of stirring western victories over the "savage Indians." My early memories of World War II, in most respects a war fought for understandable, even righteous purposes, revolved around glamorous men--soldiers-at-arms. As the war was coming to an end, however, by then being a bit older, having witnessed the changes in my mother with the loss of my brother, having learned about the numbers of children, women, and old people killed in the fire bombings of Hamburg and Dresden and in the atomic furnaces of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in the holocaust of which Dachau was but one symbol and in the siege called Stalingrad, and in witnessing the streams of refugees in all parts of the globe seeking new, possibly secure, homes, I came to realize as did most others, I suspect, that war means more than soldiers and heroic combat. It means, even more, the devastation of children, their principal nurturers, and their nurturant communities. This broader portrayal of war has become increasingly the conventional wisdom in these last three decades as we have come to witness the tragedies--the deaths of millions of men, women, and children in Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, the Middle East, in Nigeria, Afghanistan, Central America, and South Africa.

To what degree does war--its motivations, its heroic dimensions, dominate our social studies program? Young people learn a great deal in school about the violence in the lives of Caesar, Napoleon, Grant, and Patton, but very little about those who opposed militarism. How much reading do students do about our recent peacemakers--Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day, Mother Teresa, Adolpho Perez Esquival of Argentina, Helder Camara of Brazil, Desmond Tutu of South Africa? How much is known about Gandhi or the long history of non-violence? How much of what is offered as text opens up fresh ways of thinking about war, or the alternatives to

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war? What do we know about the current struggle between the Soviet Union and the United States? How is it different or similar to the struggle between Sparta and Athens in the age of the Peloponnesian Wars, between Rome and Carthage in the age of the Punic wars, between France and Germany in the late 19th and early 20th centuries? Students learn about the standardly expressed causes of war--there were five for the Civil War, four for World War I, and six for World War II--but do any of them carry much logic?

I was deeply moved as a high school student by Remarque's All Quiet on the Western Front, by Mark Twain's War Prayer, and by Dostoevski's Grand Inquisitor. I also found more recently the account in Slaughterhouse Five by Vonnegut--the scene of Billy Pilgrim watching an old World War II film, growing weary as the night progressed, and then beginning to see the movie running backward--enormously moving. I want to share a bit of that.

American planes, full of holes and wounded men and corpses took off backwards from an airfield in England. Over France, a few German fighter planes flew at them backwards, sucked bullets and shell fragments from some of the planes and crewmen. They did the same for wrecked American bombers on the ground, and those planes flew up backwards to join the formation.

The formation flew backwards over a German city that was in flames. The bombers opened their bomb bay doors, exerted a miraculous magnetism which shrunk the fires, gathered them into cylindrical steel containers, and lifted the containers into the bellies of the planes. The containers were stored neatly in racks. The Germans below had miraculous devices of their own, which were long steel tubes. They used them to suck more fragments from the crewmen and planes. But there were still a few wounded Americans, though, and some of the bombers were in bad repair. Over France, though, German fighters came up again, made everything and everybody as good as new.

When the bombers got back to their base, the steel cylinders were taken from the racks and shipped back to the United States of America, where factories were operating day and night, dismantling the cylinders, separating the dangerous contents into minerals. Touchingly, it was mainly women who did the work. The minerals were then shipped to specialists in remote areas. It was their business to put them into the ground, to hide them cleverly, so they would never hurt anybody ever again.

War clearly needs a broader brush than we have given it.

But more than war, a Peace Studies effort ought really to focus greater attention on Peace. Is Peace merely the absence of war? Or is it the absence of violence? And is violence only direct killing or is it violence when persons are treated badly, not provided adequate food or shelter, educational and employment opportunities, or political liberty?

Some of the most interesting attempts I have seen in the schools to focus on Peace have worked around the following themes: What is Peace? What is Peacemaking? How can problems be addressed non-violently? How can students be involved in Peacemaking? The possibilities around these themes are, I believe, endless--in the elementary as well as the secondary school.

What makes the themes interesting is that teachers and students can enter them as co-inquirers, persons who together attempt to create a vision of peace and identify and practice the skills that make for peace-making.

I have only touched the surface. I haven't mentioned foreign language study, cross cultural studies, sister city and sister school projects in relation to the Soviet Union or China or Mexico or Nicaragua or Argentina or Kenya, an examination of the language of the Atomic Age from Missiles as "Peace-makers" to the possible destruction of cities as "demographic targeting," or the importance of teachers as models of optimism through work as activists on behalf of peace. These, too, are related to a program of Peace Studies. A social studies program that does not address peace-making, that does not help students to understand more fully the critical public discourse of the day, that does not give far more attention to the world community, the problems of resource use and distribution, the possibilities for greater sharing and cooperation, of greater respect for and understanding of difference, is not an adequate social studies program in this difficult age.

Vito Perrone is the Dean of the Center for Teaching and Learning at the University of North Dakota.

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